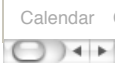


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Our View: Early release program isn't worth the cost

Wisconsin's budget crisis is having a huge impact on the state. School funding, local government aid and various programs aimed at helping the disadvantaged are getting cut – all in an effort to reduce a projected \$6.6 billion budget deficit.

By: **Editorial staff**, Hudson Star-Observer

Wisconsin's budget crisis is having a huge impact on the state.

School funding, local government aid and various programs aimed at helping the disadvantaged are getting cut – all in an effort to reduce a projected \$6.6 billion budget deficit.

On top of those harsh realities, some hardened criminals are being released from prison sooner in an effort to save money.

It's making our state much less safe.

According to a report by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, a program established last year to help save money has already proven to be a risky venture.

The report estimates that 800 inmates are eligible for such early release, although Department of Corrections Secretary Rick Raemisch apparently has the final say on whether a specific offender is granted early release or not.

Under the new program, the Department of Corrections may release inmates convicted of nonviolent felonies and misdemeanors who are less than a year away from their original release date.

Eligible offenders must have good disciplinary records while in prison, according to the program rules, and must have completed various treatment courses during their incarceration.

Officials apparently talk with victims before deciding if an inmate will be released early, and re-entry programs are established to give the freed inmate the greatest chance for success.

The program might work for some, but it clearly doesn't work for others.

Despite saving the state thousands of dollars initially, the program has had terrible results in some cases.

Numerous convicts released from prison quickly re-offended just days or weeks on the street. Some have been picked up for drug dealing, others are charged with identity theft and still others for probation violations. Many have extensive criminal records and a history of returning to crime once released from incarceration. Others have been deemed a threat to society, with officials suggesting that they remain in prison for as long as possible.

As legislators and Gov. Jim Doyle struggle to balance a state budget that is out of whack, Wisconsin residents should send a clear message to elected officials.

When it comes to public safety, tread carefully when cuts are considered. Early release programs may be good for the bottom line within the Department of Corrections, but they do little to promote a sense of security in our communities.

There's a reason why these criminals have been locked away for long periods of time. They are a threat to civil society and the longer they are off the streets the better.

In the long run, it seems to us, the cost to society is greater when certain prisoners are allowed to walk the streets rather than being imprisoned. Thus, maintaining funding for our prisons may need to continue to be a priority – despite tough economic times.

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